

(d) Recent survey in Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu indicated a prevalence level of blindness 0.98% in the State. Based on the survey, it is estimated that there are about 6.3 lakhs blind persons in the State.

News-item, "Lakhs being Fed Genetically Modified Food"

1581. SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news-item captioned, "Lakhs being fed genetically modified food" which appeared in the Times of India, dated 5th May, 2001;

(b) if so, whether it is a fact that about 800,000 women and children have been consuming for almost 10 years genetically modified food under Government nutrition programme Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) Scheme, received from CARE India, an international, NGO; and

(c) the steps taken to find out effect of such food on the consumers and to prevent such food items coming in?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) As per the information received from the Department of Women and Child Development more than 72 lakhs beneficiaries comprising children below six years and pregnant and lactating mothers are being given food-aid in terms of Corn Soya Blend and Refined Vegetable Oil supplied by CARE, an International Voluntary Organisation and that Corn and Soya Blend commercially produced in US including those produced through biotechnology are understood to be not commonly segregated for commercial domestic sale or for export.

However, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has informed that the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), a statutory body set up under the Environment Protection Act, administered by the Ministry of Environment and Forests for allowing the manufacture, Use, Import, Export and storage of Genetically modified organisms, after undertaking their biosafety assessment has not accorded approval for import of any genetically modified food in the country. Molecular probes and analytical methods for detecting, genetically Engineered ingredients in food are currently not available in the country.